

February 28, 2023

Senator Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair
Representative Paul Evans, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety

RE: PLEASE SUPPORT DOJ POP #309

Dear Senator Sollman, Representative Evans, and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety,

KIDS Center is the CAC serving Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook Counties, and providing regional services to Sherman, Harney and Wheeler Counties. On behalf of the Board of Directors of KIDS Center and all of the children in Oregon, we urge you to support POP #309 and maintain the increased funding for Children's Advocacy Centers of \$6M over the biennium. Children's Advocacy Centers have been working with the Legislature to increase state funding, and we are so grateful that our \$6M funding request was included in the Christmas Tree bill last session. As you know, the Christmas Tree bill was one-time funding, and CACs continually report that their greatest need is highly specialized staff. In fact, nearly every CAC reported using the 2021 funding for increased staff, or increased hours for existing staff.

KIDS Center used funding in 2021 to help pay for professional staff in Forensic Interviewing and Multidisciplinary Team support and coordination, critical positions needed to do the work that we do as a CAC. These funds played a key role in reducing average wait times for an evaluation appointment by one week. A portion of the funds were used to replace aging audio/visual equipment used for observing and recording forensic interviews. We record forensic interviews to create an accurate record of each interview, and these recordings may be used by our District Attorney's office as evidence in court when criminal charges are filed against an alleged abuser. This keeps abused children from enduring the trauma of telling their stories again in court.

Maintaining these funds will aid 24 CACs across the state that serve all 36 counties by providing services like medical exams and forensic interviews as well as prevention services and critical follow up family support and mental health treatment for children who have concerns of abuse. CACs work in close collaboration with law enforcement, ODHS, district attorneys, schools and other community partners during child abuse investigations, both to be cost-effective and because this model has shown improved outcomes for children.

When children cannot access a Center, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in children remaining in unsafe situations or children being removed from their homes unnecessarily. When children don't have the access they need they may also experience more trauma, due to receiving service in police stations and emergency rooms, rather than a child-friendly setting designed specifically for them.

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We want to hold the progress the Legislature made to protect kids served by Children's Advocacy Centers, and to keep much needed new staff in place. This is why we are respectfully requesting \$6M during the 2023 Legislative Session.

Sincerely,

Sandy Cummings
Board Chair
KIDS Center